

Embryo transfer recipients – make sure yours are free of MV

Maedi visna (MV) is on the increase in the national flock so it is essential to ensure that recipients being used to carry embryos are not infected with MV. For flocks that are MV accredited, only MV accredited recipients can be used. However it makes sense for any flock owner who is transferring valuable embryos to only implant them into healthy, MV accredited females. If it is not possible to source MV accredited sheep then two clear qualifying tests a minimum of six months apart are needed before the recipients can be used for MV accredited embryos in order for the embryos to retain their accredited status.

If non-MV accredited recipients are used the lambs born to them are non-MV accredited and will require two clear qualifying tests, at least six months apart, to gain MV accredited status. The earliest that the first qualifying test can be done is 12 months old. They would therefore be a minimum of 18 months old before they can gain MV accredited status. Not only that but there would be a significant risk that they could be infected with MV as the last country-wide survey for MV in 2010 found that three in 100 flocks were infected. In a couple of regions it was as high as 15% of flocks that were found to be infected. Over the years we have come across cases where valuable embryos have been implanted only for it to be found out at a later date that the ewes were infected with MV. In some cases this was before the lambs were born but in other cases the infection was only detected at a routine periodic blood test and by that time it had spread to other sheep.

MV can cross the placenta to the unborn lamb but the highest risk is after birth from close, nose-to-nose contact with, or from the colostrum or milk of, an infected sheep.

It is also important to remember that it is not just the health status of your own flock that is being jeopardised but the MV accredited status of the flocks that source from you and the flocks that source from them. If a breakdown occurs it is a minimum of 12 months to regain status and during that time there is the loss of MV accredited sales so the financial impact can be significant.

If purchasing sheep privately ensure that you see a copy of their MV accreditation scheme Health Status Report and check to make sure that it is still valid. Also check that the sheep being purchased are part of their MV accredited flock and not part of their non-MV accredited commercial flock. If there is any doubt over the status of the sheep please contact the PSGHS Office on 01463 226995 to check and for advice before adding the sheep to your flock. It is your flock and your responsibility to ensure that any sheep that enter, or have contact with it, are MV accredited.